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Armed & Dangerous

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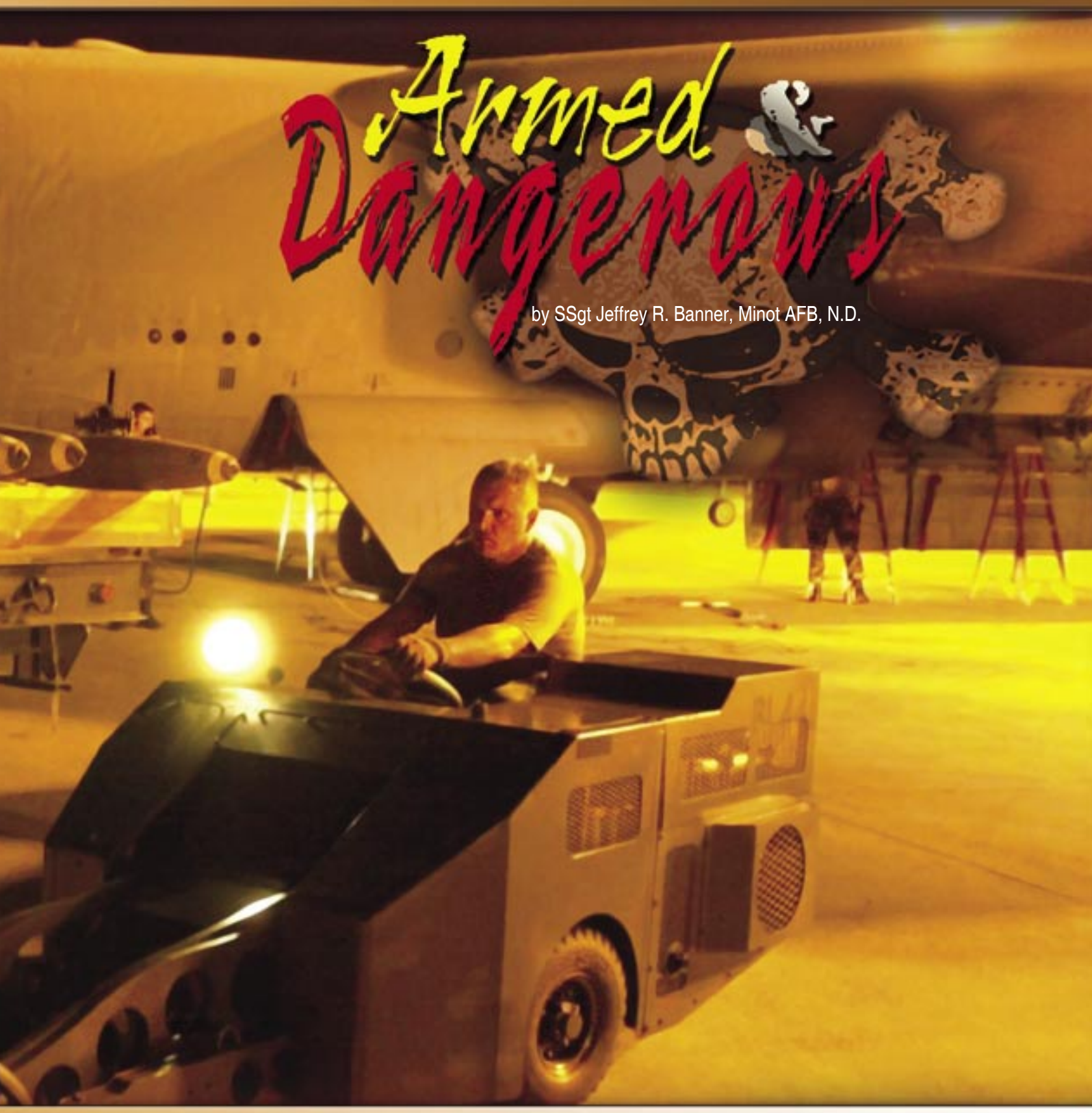

Courtesy Photo

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Even though safety is a term that is more familiar to us as Air Force members, how many of us truly incorporate it into our daily responsibilities. As an Ammo troop, I'm asked all the time, "Are those bombs safe?" My response is, "Yes. They're as safe as the respect given to them by those who store, inspect, build, load, and eventually drop them in the name of freedom." In the munitions world -- as in many other Air Force specialties -- anything other than strict compliance with technical data can have devastating results. Yet, how many of us can actually say that we have never taken a shortcut at one point in time during our military careers? Thankfully, most of those shortcuts do not result in significant mishaps, but that is not always the case.

I encountered such a potentially disastrous situation during a deployment to a forward operating location in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. A trailer configured with General Purpose (GP) bombs had just returned to the Munitions Storage Area after being downloaded from an aircraft. The driver unhooked and was dispatched to his next location. Moments later one of the shift supervisors, who was in the process of performing area checks, identified that at least one of the bombs on that trailer had a partially armed fuze. The immediate area was promptly evacuated and our control element was notified of the situation.

Now I know many of you bomb builders are shaking your heads because you know that several steps are required in the functioning chain of our fuzing systems. Here's a question to consider: How did the load crew, who downloaded it, and the line delivery crew, who transported it, accurately access the stability of that line item during both processes?

Courtesy Photo

Thankfully, after all the emergency responding agencies had been notified and were standing by to respond, the GP bomb was returned to a completely safe state. That means for all you bomb builders, all pins and ags were in place and, of course, there was all green and no red.

Some of you may be thinking that because the situation was resolved no harm was done. But harm was done. Personnel were needlessly exposed all because procedures were not followed as they should have been prior to the transport of that trailer. The time that was saved by a couple of people taking this shortcut was more than lost when operations had to come to a stop to eliminate the hazard. Now consider what might have happened had things not worked out as well as they did. Shortcuts are dangerous. Saving 5 minutes here or there can never make up for losing the life or lives of you or your coworkers in a similar scenario with a different ending.

Safety requires discipline from each one of us in our respective job areas as we accomplish our daily Air Force missions. Remember your superiors, peers, subordinates and family are all counting on you to do the dangerous tasks we do every day right the first time without the shortcuts.